

# 'Liberty nickels' don't always fetch big bucks

By Roger Boye

**T**his week's column answers more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

**Q**—You said that a 1913 "Liberty nickel" sold for \$385,000 in a January auction. We happen to own four Liberty nickels dated 1899, 1903, 1908 and 1910, all in good condition. Are they worth big money, too?

J.T.

Arlington Heights

**A**—Definitely not. Your pieces might sell for 60 cents each if you're lucky. All have mintages of 22 million or more, making them common among collectors.

The 1913 is a prized rarity because only five specimens are known. Hobbyists believe a government worker secretly made the five coins in 1913 and then smuggled them out of the Philadelphia Mint building [all 1913 nickels were supposed to depict an Indian and a buffalo, the first year for that coin design].

Three other moderately rare Liberty nickels are the 1885 [worth \$300 in "good condition"], 1886 [\$60] and the 1912-S [\$50].

**Q**—We've been reading advertisements in coin magazines to gauge the market for silver and gold pieces. Several silver dollars are listed as being "with papers" and two high-priced gold coins have "impressive pedigrees." What do those terms mean?

T.M.

Chicago

**A**—"With papers" probably indicates that an independent expert had examined the silver dollar, declared it to be genuine and then evaluated its condition. The examiner issues a certificate of authentication [dubbed "papers" in the ads], which accompanies the coin as it is sold and resold among collectors.

The American Numismatic Association and others offer certification services for a modest fee.

Rarities enjoying "impressive pedigrees" previously were owned by one or more famous individuals. Such pieces tend to fetch top dollar on the hobby market.

**Q**—I found a \$1 bill with a blank front side, except for the serial numbers and the two seals. The dollar is uncirculated. What would it be worth?

H.T.

Oak Lawn

**A**—You own a major printing error that retails for at least \$250, according to hobby catalogues. U.S. paper money is printed in three stages: first the back side, then the front and finally the serial numbers and seals. Obviously, your bill missed the middle step.